
A
S E R M O N,

PREACHED AT THE
ARCHDEACON'S VISITATION,

APRIL 23, 1790.



THE
PLACE, OBJECT, AND NATURE OF CHRISTIAN
WORSHIP CONSIDERED,

IN A
S E R M O N

PREACHED AT THE
ARCHDEACON'S VISITATION

APRIL 23, 1790,

IN THE PARISH CHURCH OF
ST. MARY AT TOWER, IPSWICH.

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S E R M O N, &c.

St. John, ch. iv. v. 23.

THE HOUR COMETH, AND NOW IS, WHEN THE TRUE
WORSHIPPERS SHALL WORSHIP THE FATHER, IN
SPIRIT AND IN TRUTH.

THE subject of conversation between our Lord and the woman of Samaria, turned upon these points; namely—"Where the place of worship ought to be—who the proper object of it was—and in what manner He is to be known, and ought to be worshipped." Upon these topics I propose to enlarge in the following discourse.

I. THE woman, as soon as she found the person she was talking with, was a Prophet,

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puts

puts a question to him, relating to the place of worship. " Our fathers," says she, " worshipped in this mountain ; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." She does not plead the command of God to justify this custom, but merely ancient usage, and the right of prescription—" Her fathers worshipped there ;" and that circumstance was a rule to them sufficient to supersede all other. The Samaritans did not want means of information in this particular. One of the priests, who had been carried away from Samaria, was sent to dwell amongst them, purposely to teach them, " How they should fear the Lord." From Him they must have learned that " Jerusalem was the place where men ought to worship." But when a people have been long attached to superstitious rites and ceremonies, custom and prejudice have more force than truth and reason ; and the circumstance of " their fathers having worshipped in that mountain," had power to prevail even over divine authority.

THE reply, which our Lord makes to her, is, " woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when

when ye shall neither in the mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem worship the Father." She who had been used to think that there was something sacred in particular places, and that prayers offered up in them had a particular efficacy, is here told, that even the Temple service at Jerusalem would soon cease, and that the worship of "the Father" would be confined neither to that place nor to the mountain in Samaria; but in whatever part of the world there were true worshippers, the Father would condescend to be adored. The earth is the Lord's, and all that dwell therein. No spot so solitary and concealed, but that a private worshipper might thence acceptably pray to, and praise his Creator, if his mind were in a proper frame. The disposition of his heart would sanctify his devotions, and not the place in which he offered them.

II. If the Samaritans were very zealous about the place from whence they were to prefer their prayers, they were at the same time equally ignorant of the Being, to whom they ought to address them. "Ye worship," says our Lord, "ye know not what." They were

not entirely without a knowledge of God; nor did they wholly neglect his worship; but they associated their deities with him, and suffered them to share in other adorations. This appears in their history. “ Then one of
 “ the priests came and dwelt in Bethel, and
 “ taught them how they should fear the Lord.
 “ Howbeit, every nation made gods of their
 “ own, and put them in the houses of the
 “ high places, which the Samaritans had
 “ made: so they feared the Lord, and served
 “ their own gods, after the manner of the
 “ nations whom they carried away from
 “ thence*.” This species of idolatry is expressly forbidden in the Scripture. “ I am
 “ the Lord, that is my name, and my glory
 “ I will not give to another, neither my praise
 “ to graven images†.” And what rendered this practice most culpable in them, was, that they neither followed the light of nature, nor the instructions of the priest, who had been sent to teach them. “ When they knew God,
 “ they glorified him not as God,” but divided their duty between Him and other beings,

* 2 Kings, xvii. 28. † Isa. xlii. 8.

which

which their ancestors had deified, and thus fell into the most senseless idolatry.

SUCH must be ever the case: for when once that primary idea, of One Almighty Father of the Universe, is given up, there is nothing so absurd and shocking which ignorance and folly may not adopt. How cautious then ought men to be, in admitting sentiments at all derogatory from the peerless Majesty of Jehovah, as they never fail to lead them into the wildest errors, and inconceivable superstition. And what renders this caution still more necessary, is, that corruptions in religion are more difficult to remove than any other. An error in worship, however palpable and absurd, and by whatever means it creeps in, is often retained for no other reason, but because it is there already. So much greater veneration is always paid to antiquity, than to truth! This was exactly the case with the Samaritans; for we read, "that they feared the Lord, and served their graven images, both their children, and their children's children; as did their fathers, so do they, unto this day."

BUT

BUT this ignorance and uncertainty was not to be found amongst the Jews. God had manifested himself to them by the most wonderful evidence of his power, wisdom, and goodness. These divine attributes were all exerted, to give them a clear and perfect knowledge of their duty to Him. "He shewed his ways unto Moses, his works unto the children of Israel." And we repeatedly read, what was intended by this display of the attributes of God; that they might impress a devout and lasting idea of his unity and supremacy; "that they might know that the Lord he is God, and that there is none else beside Him."

WE find our Lord also, during the whole of his ministry, adhering to this fundamental principle of his national religion. His repeated and fervent acts of prayer are recorded in scripture, and the object to whom he preferred it, is most clearly ascertained. He has left us not only his own example for our imitation, but a most comprehensive form of words for our use and direction. The great Being, to whom He offered these addresses,
was

was One, and the same. He never varied from the object, nor taught 'his countrymen to adore any other than HIM, to whom they had been accustomed. When he poured forth praises and thanksgivings, they were uttered in this strain, "I thank Thee, *O Father*, " Lord of Heaven and Earth, that Thou hast " hid these things from the wise and prudent, " and hast revealed them unto babes." When he meant to express his submission to the divine will, and his readiness to fulfil the purposes of his mission, he made use of these words: "*O my Father*, if this cup may not " pass away from me, except I drink it, thy " will be done." Agreeably to his own practice, He taught his disciples, " Pray to *thy Father*, which is in secret, and *thy Father*, " who seeth in secret, shall reward thee " openly. Use not vain repetitions, for *your Father* knoweth what things ye have need of " before ye ask him." The Apostles followed his example, and taught the same doctrine. " For this cause," says St. Paul, " I bow my " knees unto *the Father* of our Lord Jesus " Christ; giving thanks always for all things to " God,

“ God, even the *Father* *.” And, that both our Saviour and his Apostles looked up for succour, to One and the same Almighty Being—the great Parent of the Universe, the Father of mankind—appears from these words of our Lord, “ Go to my brethren, “ and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father, and to my God, “ and to your God †.” The same truth the apostle Paul asserts to his heathen converts :—
 “ Though there be a multiplicity of deities, “ and imaginary beings, that are called Gods, “ whether in Heaven or in Earth; to us “ Christians, there is but One God—the Father—of whom are all things, and we by “ Him ‡.”

THE bare recital of these texts, is sufficient to establish their meaning. That they should ever have been mistaken or misapplied, is the wonder. For they are no less agreeable to our natural notions of the Deity, than they are to the whole tenor and design of Scripture. Yet still, as was the case in St.

* Ephes. iii. 14, 20. † John xx. 17. ‡ 1 Cor. viii. 5, 6.

Paul's time, " There is not in every man this " knowledge," but there might be, if the Scripture were the universal rule of faith. This is a plain and easy directory; all other guides, are not only fallible, but more apt to mislead and bewilder, than to give any intelligible information. The bare terms, in which some of them couch their knowledge, are often more abstruse and difficult to be comprehended, than the subject of which they treat. The end too proposed, between these different ways of instruction, is very apparent. The one—" is profitable for doctrine; for re-
 " proof; for correction; for instruction in
 " righteousness; that the Man of God may be
 " perfect; thoroughly furnished unto all good
 " works." The other, is totally unprofitable; being taken up in barren speculations, which perplex the understanding, without any moral improvement, without planting one virtue in the heart. The surest way, therefore, in our religious concerns, is to adhere to the words of Scripture, in every particular; by so doing, we shall become the " true worship-
 " pers, who know what we worship; and

“ who worship the Father in spirit and in
 “ truth ; for the Father seeketh such to wor-
 “ ship *Him*.

WE are naturally led to consider, thirdly—
 the manner in which the Divine Being is to be
 known, and ought to be adored. Such a re-
 velation of Himself and his will, as the Al-
 mighty granted to the Jews, had not been
 vouchsafed to other nations. “ He had not
 “ dealt so with them, neither had the Heathen
 “ such knowledge of his laws.” Our Saviour
 might well affirm to the woman of Samaria,
 “ we know what we worship, for salvation is
 “ of the Jews.” But we are not here to ima-
 gine, that the Jews knew more about the
 essence, or mode of God’s existence, than the
 Samaritans did. No ! this was a secret un-
 fathomable by them both. Their superiority
 consisted in what, if rightly applied, would
 have terminated in a practical knowledge of
 their Maker ; in pious affections towards
 Him ; and in a dutiful regard to his laws.
 And wherever, in Scripture, we meet with
 such an expression, as, “ knowing God,” or,
 the

“ the knowledge of God,” it is always connected with some moral duty, or revelation of Himself, which is plain and intelligible; and never implies an abstruse notion, or metaphysical idea. David says, “ Thou, Solomon, my son, “ know” thou the God of thy “ father, and serve him with a perfect heart, “ and with a willing mind; for the Lord “ searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all “ the imaginations of the thoughts; if thou “ seek Him, He will be found of thee; but if “ thou forsake Him, He will cast thee off forever *.” Had there been any difficulty in the precept, the father would have explained it to his son; but as he could not fail of comprehending it, he dwells longer upon the duty subjoined; for had he swerved from that, it would have been of fatal consequence; a defect in practice being much more dangerous than an error in the understanding. But the prophet predicts †, that under the Christian dispensation, our “ knowledge,” and duty to God, would need no

* 1 Chron. xxviii. 9.

† Jerem. xxxi. 34.

comment to make it clear and practicable.

“ For this is the covenant that I will make
 “ with the house of Israel, after those days,
 “ saith the Lord, I will put my *Laws* into
 “ their mind, and write them in their hearts,
 “ and I will be to them a God, and they
 “ shall be to me a people ; and they shall not
 “ teach every man his neighbour, and every
 “ man his brother ; saying, “ know ” the Lord,
 “ for all shall “ know ” me, from the “ least ” to
 “ the greatest.” And the same prophet * tells
 us, wherein this knowledge is to be exercised ;
 and that it consisted in the proper discharge
 of the relative duties of life. For, speaking of
 the good reign of Josiah, King of Judah, he
 says, “ He did *judgment* and *justice* ; he
 judged the cause of the poor and needy ; was
 “ not this to “ know me,” saith the Lord ? ”
 Similar to this, is the whole tenor of the
 Gospel : “ Hereby do we know, that we
 “ know ” him, if we *keep his Commandments*.
 “ Beloved, let us love one another, for *Love*
 “ is of God, and *every one that loveth*, is
 “ born of God, and “ knoweth ” God † ” The

* Jerem. xxii. 15, 16.

† John ii. 3. iv. 7.

object of a Christian's worship, and the knowledge of God, as far as it relates to any moral and practical purpose, is so clear and plain, that he may with truth affirm, that "he knows," what he worships. But if it be multiplied, or if unscriptural terms be used to express it by ; if his faith be perplexed, and his reason confounded, and what ought to be known "from the least to the greatest," be so mysterious, as to be understood by neither ; then it may be said of him, "that he worships he knows not what."

BUT ignorance and superstition were soon to give way to truth and reason ; and these abuses to be rectified by a reformation, which was then to take place. "The Hour cometh, and now is, says our Saviour, when the true worshippers, shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth ; for the Father seeketh such to worship *Him*." An end was to be put at once to the contention, which had produced such heat and animosity between the Jews and Samaritans. The Temple of Jerusalem, and the service in it, which

which God himself had instituted, was soon to cease; and all that was to be required, was, that men should worship “the Father, in Spirit and in Truth.” To do this effectually, there needed neither forms nor ceremonies; no solemn temples, nor costly victims, but the offering only of a clean hand, and a pure heart. “Lord, who shall abide in thy *Tabernacle*? who shall dwell on thy holy hill? “He that walketh uprightly, and worketh “righteousness, and speaketh the truth from “his heart. He that hath used no deceit in “his tongue, nor done evil to his neighbour, “and hath not slandered his neighbour. He “that setteth not by himself, but is lowly in “his own eyes, and maketh much of them “that fear the Lord. He that sweareth to “his neighbour, and disappointeth him not, “though it were to his own hindrance. He “that hath not given his money upon usury, “nor taken reward against the innocent; “whoso doeth these things shall never fall.” The worship of this man is acceptable, and he it is that frequents the Tabernacle of the Lord, in Spirit, and in Truth.

HAVING

HAVING fully considered the several points, which were the subjects of our Saviour's discourse, with the woman of Samaria, I shall make a few remarks upon it, and conclude.

FIRST, It follows from what has been said. That it is to no purpose to be zealous for the place, or ceremonies of worship, when the doctrines of it are erroneous; much less to plead antiquity for the continuance of what ought never to have been admitted. For if length of time can sanctify abuses, and age make error venerable, the Church of Rome has a plea to urge, which no one that has reformed from her, can dispute: For in this case, her precedence would be her greatest Honour. But if there be still a Church of greater antiquity than them all,—“a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but holy and without blemish,” which has Truth itself for its author, and salvation for its end, it is this *Christian Church* we should be zealous for, wherever is its place, and whoever worships in it. Nor need its faithful members ever fear that any Danger can befall it.

it. What force or power can assail that fabric, " which is built upon the foundation of " of the Apostles, Jesus Christ himself being " the chief corner stone ?" The Danger is not from without, but within. " The gates of Hell will not prevail against it." " But if " any man build upon this foundation, wood, " hay, or stubble" if any man debase the " Scriptures, by adding to them absurdities in " doctrine, or superstitions in practice, his " work shall be made manifest; for the day " shall declare it; because it shall be revealed " by fire, and the fire shall try every man's " work of what sort it is."

II. OUR Saviour has predicted, a reformation would take place in the public worship; and a day would come, " when the true " worshippers, would worship the Father, in " Spirit, and in Truth." That this was not done in such purity as it ought, even in the Jewish Church, which God's own right hand had planted, appears from the hypocrisy and superstition, with which the Jews were so justly charged. Much less was it done in Samaria,

Samaria, "where they worshiped Idols in
 "company with Jehovah." The progress
 that Divine Truth made, during the ministry
 of Christ and his Apostles, is astonishing.
 The corruptions, however, which soon fol-
 lowed, are too well known to need any re-
 mark. "The enemy sowed tares among the
 "good feed;" which grew and increased
 wonderfully. The revival of learning brings
 us to the æra of the Reformation, when the
 Light of Truth broke forth again, and held
 religion to our view; not indeed clad in her
 brightest attire, but disgraced with too many
 of the tawdry ornaments with which Christian
 Idolaters had disguised her. Much was then
 done, but much still remains to be done.
 That Churches, as well as individuals have
 not erred, is too much for human frailty to
 assume. We are "allowed" to say, "that
 "the Church of Jérusalem, of Antioch, of
 "Alexandria, of Rome, have erred." And
 if we do not arrogate to "ourselves" that
 infallibility, which was the cause of our se-
 paration from the latter, "We" may have
 erred likewise. But if candour will permit

us to see our errors, and if we have good sense to correct them, we may be in time to avoid the Fate that now awaits the See of Rome, which is tottering to its very basis, by the weight of its own corruptions. And this we may be assured of, that "God will never suffer his *Truth* to fail." For if amidst the general revolt of his own People, who were purposely set apart to worship Him, "he reserved unto Himself, seven thousand knees, which had not bowed to Baal." will that prophecy remain unfulfilled, which expressly says, "that the time was coming, when the true worshippers should worship the Father, in Spirit, and in Truth?"

LASTLY.—I have only to add, that we, of this enlightened age and nation, who "make our boast of God, and profess to know his will and approve the things that are more excellent." That we, be careful to let our practice keep pace with our knowledge; that in our belief—we "hold fast the Faith, once delivered to the Saints," which was given to them in a very short summary; "To believe
"Thee

“ Thee to be the only true God, and Jesus, whom thou has sent, to be the Christ ; and that in our worship, we be in the number of those, who in the text, are stiled “ the only “ true worshippers ; who worship the Father, in Spirit, and in Truth.” Thus our Light will so shine before Men, that they will glorify our Father which is in Heaven.

To whom be ascribed all Honour, Power, Might, Majesty, and Dominion, henceforth and for ever.

F I N I S.

There is no other God, and Jesus
whom thou hast said to be the Christ; and
that in our writings we have the number of
those who in the last century were
"true worshippers" of God, and who
"did not believe in a God, but in
light was to shine upon them, and
will glorify our Father who is in heaven."

18 JA 53